**What issues must the policy community consider in designing policies to promote the recruitment and retention of high quality teachers in the public school system? Compare and contrast two specific approaches and explain their benefits and disadvantages.**

The reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (2001) coupled with Race to the Top has challenged the role of the federal government in determining the purpose of education in the American public school system. After the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) the educational psychology and composition of schools have been redirected toward international completion and globalism. The report contended “if an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war”. This ideology has driven innovative teaching and learning and heightened accountability standards. Consequently, efforts to increase the global competiveness of the American public school system have abandoned racial and economic inequality that exists in our own backyards.

Inequality in schooling has been in the fabric of the growth of public education. During the 19th century, the intensification of industrialization and manufacturing led to the unanticipated influx of immigrant youth and culturally uncivilized workers. In 1918, compulsory attendance laws were implemented to “Americanize” immigrant youth and to socialize children to new political and economic conditions” (Tozer, Violas, & Senese, 1995). The economic and social transformations that defined the era led to vast urbanization and Horace Mann’s impartation for the Common Schools Movement. Mann’s ideology was to impart a “moral education as the most important element of popular schooling” (Rury, 2002). This conceptualization of the purpose of schooling has been at the forefront during the 20th century education movement. The changing role of schools in achieving social and racial equality has exposed a continuum of egalitarian measures without egalitarian outcomes. With increased federal intervention to equalize education through Head Start and the War on Poverty the “new definition of what constituted equality of opportunity focused on groups rather than individuals” (Church and Sedlak, 1976). However the competing purposes of schooling and challenges of ensuring educational equality has failed to address issues of inequity within the classroom. This educational objective still lures the American consciousness today.

Federal and state efforts to create an egalitarian education system have led researchers to the education production function framework. Economic perspectives on education have viewed schools as maximizing their utility through the usage of specific inputs that maximize outcomes. Using the production function model, researchers have debated the role of inputs in achieving student outcomes. Recent discourse surrounding the role of teacher quality in equalizing educational opportunity has led to a revision of teaching standards and certification pathways. No Child Left Behind (2001) defined highly qualified teaching as an individual having certification in the subject taught or elective credits that demonstrate subject matter proficiency. However, the illuminating debate on the effective recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers has led to a stalemate when addressing systematic issues of equity in the classroom. How can a “highly qualified teacher” be defined within the diverse yet often homogenous schools that construct the system of education when ensuring equality? The discourse surrounding this concern has led to fragmented teacher certification programs and standards that contest recruitment and retention practices for the teaching profession and for America’s youth.

The recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers is a concern of students, parents, policy makers, and education advocates. Policies to promote recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers are essential to the academic enrichment of all children. Consequently, approaches to recruit and retain teachers is variable and often results in contentious debates that hinder the educational projection of students. The first theoretical approach focuses on the education production function and contends that teacher inputs can achieve racial equality in education. Teacher inputs consist of professionalizing standards for certification and are constructed of observable teacher characteristics. The intrinsic value is place on teacher competency and teachers within the space of schooling. Proponents of teacher certification argue that it promotes equality through standardized teacher preparation. The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (2010) contends that professionalized standards allow teachers to have robust training that will lead to their active retention. Citing the medical profession as a comparison model for teachers to develop a core competency and result in lower teacher turnover rates. Comparatively Lankford, Loeb, & Wykoff (2002) contend that teacher quality is correlated with student achievement. Yet, opposition to this perspective contest higher standards will reduce the teaching population through elevated requirements and expectations. Weiss (1996) examines the role of ‘signaling’ of teacher credentials can serve as a stratifying mechanism for professions that lack the educational marker of “highly qualified’ but exhibit other un-coded characteristics.

The second theoretical approach focuses on the education production function as a “black box” to schooling. Although there are inputs and outputs that are visible to the policy community, there is little evidence of what occurs within the classroom. This perspective contends that there are unobservable characteristics that teacher’s exhibit that can address issues of equality in schools. Segments of literature on economics of education challenges the role of school inputs in producing student outcomes citing “researchers have found no systematic relationship between student achievement and inputs that reformers and researchers always assumed matter” (Burtless, 1996). School inputs including teacher credentialism, salaries, and experience may not have direct impacts on addressing issues of equality.

Ferguson & Hanushek (1996) contend that “even if measureable teacher characteristics have little observable impact on student performance, unobserved characteristics appear to matter a great deal” (Burtless, 1996). Furthermore, concerns of what occurs in the “black box” of schooling focuses on the role of the hidden curriculum in maintaining the status quo of inequitable schooling. Bowles and Gintis (1976) correspondence theory notates that “society’s economic organizations are mirrored in institutions and are organized the same as factories” where the hidden curriculum serves to convey “implicit messages and appropriate beliefs, values, and behaviors to children” (DeMarrias & LeCompte, 1999). This culture capital is often not of the non-dominant culture and often results in teachers that are ill-prepared to teach children that vastly differ from their traditional background.

Opponents of this perspective contend that standardizing the teaching professors serves to address the “black box” of schooling by challenging what occurs. This can be achieved through the professionalization of teaching rather than focusing on variability. However, how a quality teacher is defined can vary based on geographic, cultural, and linguistic experiences. There are various successful approaches that demonstrate various inputs that can increase student achievement and led to equality in student opportunity. Strategies include increase and equalize salaries, recruitment drives and incentives, and support systems (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). Yet, the question remains if whether teacher certification is enough to address systematic issues of exclusion and equity in the American education system. In consideration of this answer, there are several aspects that the policy community should consider in the development of recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers.

First, the changing purposes of school has altered the role and required qualifications of teachers. Labaree’s examination of the purposes of school including democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility greatly influence the type of education that a child receives. In particular, it is often the ”incoherence in public education that is a result of tensions surrounding these conflicting goals and values” (Labaree, 1997). This divergence of these goals can hinder state and federal efforts to address issues of equity in the classroom. Second, the changing racial composition of the public school system warrants a reexamination of “who” is being recruited and unobservable characteristics that may influence equity in schools. Although No Child Left Behind defines teacher quality based on credentials, can researchers really measure teacher quality in such a heterogeneous school system? Should quality be only in one form?

Lastly, the policy community should consider the role of instituting reform and obtaining buy-in for teachers. Recent implementations of “pay for performance plans” for teachers as a recruitment and retention mechanism had not led to massive growth in the distribution of teacher quality among diverse populations. There is not a vast issue with “hiring unqualified teachers, but teacher sorting but distribution inequalities and variations of teachers” (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Furthermore, there should be a reexamination of what is education reform and how recruitment and retention policies can have unintended consequences. Tyack and Cuban (1995) contend in the grammar of schooling “educational reform is difficult because the public and education professionals have a strong sense of what constitutes real education”. These notions should become components of the decision making process for the policy community.

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